

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

O.P. Dwivedi, *Literature of the Indian Diaspora* (Pencraft International, 2011)

Literature of the Indian Diaspora constitutes a major study of the literature and other cultural texts of the Indian diaspora. It is also an important contribution to diaspora theory in general. Applying a theoretical framework based on trauma, mourning/impossible mourning, spectres, identity, travel, translation, and recognition, this anthology uses the term 'migrant identity' to refer to any ethnic enclave in a nation-state that defines itself, consciously or unconsciously, as a group in displacement. The present anthology examines the works of key writers, many now based across the globe in Canada, Denmark, America and the UK – V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Balachandra Rajan, M.G. Vassanji, Jhumpa Lahiri, Gautam Malkani, Shiva Naipaul, Tabish Khair and Shauna Singh Baldwin, among them – to show how they exemplify both the diasporic imaginary and the respective traumas of Indian diasporas.

Corelating the concept of diaspora – literally dispersal or the scattering of a people – with the historical and contemporary presence of people of Indian sub-continental origin in other areas of the world, this anthology uses this paradigm to analyse Indian expatriate writing. In *Reworlding*, O.P. Dwivedi has commissioned ten critical essays by as many scholars to examine major areas of the diaspora. Collectively, the essays demonstrate that the various literary traditions within the Indian diaspora share certain common resonances engendered by historical connections, spiritual affinities, and racial memories. Individually, they provide challenging insights into the particular experiences and writers. At the core of the diasporic writing is the haunting presence of India and the shared anguish of personal loss that generate the aesthetics of 'reworlding' underlying and unifying this body of literature. This collection will be of value to scholars and students of Indian writing in English, postcolonial writing in general, and the literature of exile and immigration.

This collection of essays also retraces the postcolonial narratives of Indian diaspora etched by diasporic Indian writers. What mainly comes under its scrutiny is the complex experience of migrancy, encompassing both cultural hybridisation and assimilation on the one hand and lingering nostalgia and cultural alienation on the other. Its critique of the recent and not so recent diasporic texts, at once probing and insightful, foregrounds the deterritorialised, expatriate sensibility of their authors. Noticeably, the study contends that this sensibility blends seamlessly with various prominent features of this variety of diasporic writing, for instance, of individuation and self-definition in Rushdie, of conquest of rootlessness in Jhumpa Lahiri, of cultural inbetweenness in B. Rajan, and of the special charms of diasporic sensibility itself in Naipaul.

This anthology, consisting of ten essays, encompasses an overarching view of the writing of the Indian diaspora. Of these, the first paper, by Silvia Albertazzi, titled 'Translation, Migration and Diaspora in Salman Rushdie's fiction', brilliantly argues how migrant narration becomes a fiction of individuation and self-definition, a kind of travel literature where departure is often forced, transit is endless and one very rarely reaches a point of arrival where present is lived by renaming the past. Migration always implies change: and change involves the risk of losing one's identity. Whilst the migrant does not recognize him/herself in his/her new image, the people around him/her do not accept his/her otherness. Therefore, s/he is compelled to face everyday life through a continuous oscillation

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between reality and dream. The migrant writer opposes imagination and the fantastic to western realistic mimesis. Albertazzi stresses, 'The migrant is compelled to experience the world through imagination' (34). The second paper, 'Reconfigured Identities: "Points of Departure" and Alienation of Arrival in Balachandra Rajan's *The Dark Dancer*', by Anna Clarke examines at length the postcolonial predicament of Rajan's protagonist, Krishnan, in the novel to 'belong' to his society and its cultural paradigms because of his long stay in the West. Krishnan is a victim, according to Clarke, of the cultural quandary of 'inbetweenness'. Clarke notices that Rajan's essays warn against reconfiguration of power structures within a postcolonial world. Binarisms of empire and colony, the colonised and the coloniser, implying a sense of locus, boundary, perceptible structure, conceived of in terms of centre and an outside, dissolve in the late twentieth and twenty-first century. The third paper, "'Mahabharata is yet to happen': Communal Violence and Diasporic Time in M.G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* and *A Place Within*' by Nancy E. Batty discusses the divisive forces working so outrageously in the author's ancestral homeland and leaving an indelible impression on the human mind. It upholds that the novel walks a fine line between espousing scepticism and religious faith. It also explores the complexities of contemporary Indian politics and the deceptions practiced by the present-day politicians (who do not hesitate to provoke violence and killing to advance their selfish ends). The fourth paper, "'The Imaginative Promptings of My Many-sided Background": V.S. Naipaul's Diasporic Sensibility' by Gillian Dooley, ascertains the truth that Naipaul's sensibility is primarily diasporic, as he is a prolific writer who is twice removed from the motherland (India). And to be diasporic – constantly on the move – is one of the special charms of his writing. Dooley also exposes Naipaul's feeling of being uprooted and deracinated, which may have started with his first move from the security of all he knew to the new, exciting world of Port of Spain at the age of six, and which became, paradoxically, his means of making a place for himself in the world. The fifth paper, 'Home Abroad: Shauna Singh Baldwin's Feminine Journey' by Geetanjali Singh Chanda, takes up the metaphor of journey and applies it to the author's moving abroad (as represented by her protagonist). It shows at some length how Baldwin's novels and short stories interweave themes of gender, religion, and geography and gender inhibitions. Chanda divides the paper into three parts. The first part presents a brief background of Indian English writing which continues to be marked by a double burden. In the second part, the paper explores how the entry and prominence of diaspora writers has further muddled the waters of Indian English writing. The third part offers Shauna Singh Baldwin as a case study of intersectionality in diaspora. The sixth paper, 'Home and Journey as Postcolonial Paradigms in Tabish Khair's *The Bus Stopped*' by Esterino Adami, advocates that 'home' and 'journey' are two powerful metaphors in Khair's *The Bus Stopped* – the home standing for identity and memory, while 'journey' for diasporic dynamism and movement. Adami suggests that in Khair's texts the notion of travelling could be expanded and interpreted as a metaphor of psychological change. The seventh essay by Martin Kich endorses the value of Shiva Naipaul's writings and pleads for the serious reading. Kich asserts that there is a value in considering the differences, as well as the similarities, between the two brothers' work. The eighth paper, 'Negotiating Memory and Cinemaspace amongst the Indian Diaspora in Guyana' by Atticus Narain, traces the development of cinema in Guyana (the West Indies) and the introduction of Indian movies there. The author laments the

loss of cinema and movies in the present day. The ninth paper, 'The One and Many Borders of a Sari: Paratactics of Place and the Remapping of Rootlessness in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*' by Jorge Diego Sanchez, dwells on the overwhelming sense of loss and despair to be felt in the fictional writings of Lahiri, showing how the author seems to be engrossed in her diasporic location/dislocation. The tenth and last paper, 'The Limits of Hybridity in Gautam Malkani's *Londonstani*' by Lopamudra Basu, examines this novel as embodying the hybrid aesthetic of the postcolonial diasporic South Asian novel, while simultaneously expressing deep anxieties about racial and religious inter-mixing.

The focus of this book is not historical, though some historical elements are covered. Instead the book sets out to focus on texts written by visible writers who are seen to belong to Indian Diaspora. This anthology of papers by scholars from different countries is distinguished by their attempt to look at the writing of the Indian Diaspora from different perspectives. Hence it prevents the notion of diaspora from slipping into a sweeping catchphrase and employs it contextually and with analytical sharpness. It is this that makes it a significant and necessary contribution in the fields of postcolonialism as well as and the study of Indian English literature.

One of the accomplishments of this volume is that it exhibits the range of critical engagement in Literature of the Indian Diaspora. The discussions are useful because they provide a crisp account of certain dilemmas in Indian diasporic writing and provide a valuable resource for thinking about the multilayered nature of Indian diasporic literary production.

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